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Special Analysis

YUGOSLAVIA:

Ethnic Tensions in Kosovo Province

Tensions between ethnic Slavs and Albanians in Yugoslavia's Kosovo Province—one of two provinces in the Republic of Serbia—have heightened recently, raising the chance of communal violence. The Republic of Serbia is trying to use these tensions to reassert control over the Albanian-dominated province. At a minimum, interregional polemics will flare at a party plenum later this month.

Kosovo's Serbs and Montenegrins increasingly complain they are being pushed to other parts of Yugoslavia as Albanians buy their land and harass them. Tensions rose anew in late April when police attempted to break up a demonstration of more than 10,000 Serbs and Montenegrins protesting discrimination.

Serbian leaders are exploiting ethnic Serb resentment against the Kosovo leadership. Serbian officials probably allowed nationalist intellectuals from Belgrade to help organize the April protest, which sought to focus the national spotlight on Serb concerns. At a Central Committee plenum of the national party only days later, Serbian leaders aired their complaints, accusing local Albanians of genocide against Kosovo Serbs.

Nonetheless, Serbian officials almost certainly want to avoid communal violence and are trying to contain Serb passions. They probably encouraged the appeal for calm that the Serbian Orthodox Patriarch made when he spoke on 24 May at an ancient Serb religious center in a mostly Albanian part of Kosovo.

Serbs will try to use the Central Committee plenum to renew their push for constitutional changes that would allow them to increase their control over the province. Kosovo's Albanian leaders will resist and will try to enlist the support of other regions that also fear Serb domination.

An uneasy calm is the best that national leaders can hope for in the next few months. As the Kosovo Serbs become more organized, however, a political spark could result in violence. Security forces, and if necessary the Army, would probably contain and crush any large-scale disturbances. The more distant northern republics want political tensions between Serbia and Kosovo to remain in check, but a failure at least to maintain the Serbs' position in Kosovo will fuel Serb nationalism.

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3 June 1987